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where the first thought of stricken and suffering men and women was for others. As long as this spirit lasts the British still have something to do in the world.

A minor but interesting point is to compare the unskilled chroniclers with the skilled. The material is so marvellous that none but the insincere could fail with it.

Then happened one of those little incidents that, when they occur (and they occurred fairly frequently to the B.E.F.), give one the sensation of having raised a ghost. On the edge of the village stood a small farmhouse in a very ruinous condition. It was utterly deserted, and obviously hadn't been tenanted for years. I opened the door which led straight into a room. Chalked in big letters on the opposite wall was the command:

WIPE YOUR FEET, PLEASE.
1918.

It was so peremptory that I almost obeyed, forgetting that this was not 1918 but 1939, and that only the ghosts of a past officers' mess in a past war would grouse if I didn't.

It is not well written: Mr. Hodson would have made something very different of it; but the incident has a power which no flatness, no underlining, no adverbial incontinence can spoil. And the unskilled narrators have a felicity at great moments which even Mr. Hodson could not better. Sergeant Jack Wadsworth is talking about his sensations of fear under protracted bombing. "Somehow," he says, "it tasted like a penny I once popped in my mouth when I was a kid." What professional writer would have ventured that? And Mrs. Hart, whose house was bombed over her head: "I remember just looking up there where the house used to be and then sort of not thinking about it any more." And then "I picked up a little china jug absolutely uncracked in our ruins, but it wasn't mine. Somebody from the pub. on the corner had put it there for a joke." *For a joke.* There is not a living writer known to me who could have imagined those three words.

Mr. Downing did not leave Paris till the Germans were within twenty miles of the city. Throughout an appalling journey to Bordeaux, to Bayonne, and thence into Spain, he kept up his spirits and laughed when he could—and sometimes when others could not. It is a vivid story, with an odd individual flavour.

Mr. Hodson records his experiences as a war correspondent from October, 1939, to the heavy raids on London a year later. The other books are the raw material of history. His is history.

L. A. G. STRONG.

The Machinery of the Church

The English Church and How it Works. By Cecilia M. Ady. (Faber and Faber. 10s. 6d.)

THIS is a book of the "What an X requires to know about Y" variety, and excellent in that kind. Some people like facts, others prefer estimates and impressions. Miss Ady is concerned with facts. To tell the truth about a Church in a heap of verifiable facts is no doubt impossible, but the authoress does her best to avoid creating a too painfully institutional or financial impression by a continued reminder of the ends which ecclesiastical machinery exists to serve. But the mainspring of interest is historical curiosity: there is the pleasure of the hunt in the tracing of so many venerable offices and customs to their remoter origins, and this is the plan of exposition followed. The style is admirable, and anyone who wants to know how the Church of England came to be what it is will enjoy the book. The personal views of the authoress are only just detectable, and generous appreciation is shown of all who have made a positive contribution to the building of the Church. Many misconceptions would be removed by the study of her work. The reviewer, for example, used ignorantly to suppose that the parish clergy were better off formerly than they now are, and that a fall in the value of money has hit a class living on fixed endowments. But this is not so: the great majority of them has always been intolerably poor, and the minimum standard has been steadily raised by great and continuous exertions. The Church has never been rich: its insufficient funds have been iniquitously distributed. That livings were often held in plurality or by men of independent property as a convenient addition to family wealth is another story.

Such general impressions as Miss Ady allows herself of the existing Church are perfectly frank, but perhaps a trifle optimistic. The grounds of her optimism are visible, and what we think of them will depend upon the view we take of history. If the way a thing has come to be is the best clue to its nature, then our faith in the adaptability and survival-value of the Church will be as high as hers. If we take Henry Ford's view of history and allow no weight to any but existing facts, we shall need to seek a more transcendent ground for our confidence.

AUSTIN FARRER.

From Plough to Press Room

Land Truant. By Crichton Porteous. (Harrap. 8s. 6d.)

Land Truant is the third part of Mr. Crichton Porteous' autobiographical trilogy of the land. In the first, *Farmer's Creed*, he described a youthful revolt that led him from a Manchester cotton house to become a farm-labourer in Derbyshire; in the second, *Teamsman*, he went on to full-muscled apprenticeship, a ploughman proud of a team and craft of his own. In these books the style, at its best, setting down the realities of farm-tasks and men and landscapes, had the solid beauty of a tree-trunk, though occasionally one felt the need to rub out sentences, as one rubs off the crust of old and disfiguring bark.

The cause of these occasional defects now becomes clear—they originate in the reporters' room, the sub-editors' room, the editor's chair; they are the legacy of Mr. Porteous' ten-year stretch of imprisonment on a Manchester newspaper. One of Mr. Porteous' virtues is a kind of tenacious adaptability: the white-fingered, soft-muscled young man from the cotton warehouse broke himself in under hard and ill-paid conditions that might well have broken up a youth of his class. The strong, brown-armed ploughman going into the reporters' wash-room for the first time is frightened by something: he sees the arms of a fellow reporter:

He had hung his jacket on the hook and had rolled his shirt-sleeves to his elbows. Under the cream glass of the electric light his fore-arms were the most repellent I had seen, puffed up, terribly soft, truly described by no other word than tardy. In the next bowl my own arms, still lean and brown and tough, contrasted with them as hawthorn wood with elder pith. I was genuinely scared, realising all at once that probably my arms would become like his if I lived as he was living, which meant if I went on with the life that I had then got myself into. It was a queer, uncomfortable moment, when I seemed to see dimly that if I wanted to become a writer like Posselthwaite I should have to sacrifice health and untold freedom. Either I must give up now and go back to the farm, or I must be prepared to sacrifice these things.

The reporter's arms represent all the artificiality and horror of the inessential life. Yet Mr. Porteous goes on; the rush of the Evening Special takes the place of the afternoon milking; the daily deadly routine of coroner's court, police court and local fire replace the harnessing of the affectionate team, the pegging-out of lands, the beauty of the turned furrow. The raw reporter rises on the steps of sublime mistakes to higher things. The peculiar tenacity that made him a good ploughman, proud of his field, makes him in turn a good sub-editor, proud of a page. The same kind of restless courage that took him

SAGITTARIUS RHYMING

by 'Sagittarius'
(otherwise 'Fiddlestick' of *Time and Tide*)

5s.

'The author is a verse-satirist of outstanding accomplishment. And to read the verses in bulk is to be torn between admiration for Sagittarius's wit and virtuosity and a sense of the tragic errors and misdirection which his ironical comment on recent history exposes...' *The Times Literary Supplement*

S.O.S.—LUDLOW

by Christopher Hassall

5s.

A new book of poems by the winner of the Hawthornden Prize, 1939. The long title-poem describes the wreck by torpedo of a liner returning to England.

JONATHAN CAPE : LONDON : W.C.1

from the land eventually, I am glad to say, took him back. If *Land Truant* lacks the stout beauty of the earlier books it is purely by reason of subject. In it Mr. Porteous explains rather than reveals himself. It is the city sandwich taken from under the glass cover as compared with the solid hunk of meat and bread eaten with a jack-knife under the hawthorn. There can be no two ways as to which is the better fare: no two ways about it. And it will be very good to see Mr. Porteous behind the team again, his eye on the stick and the lines straight in his hands.

H. E. BATES.

The Colours of Their Trade

The Man in the Moonlight. By Helen McCloy. (Hamish Hamilton. 7s. 6d.)

Black Plumes. By Margery Allingham. (Heinemann. 8s.)

Counterpoint Murder. By G. D. H. and M. Cole. (Crime Club. 7s. 6d.)

Exit to Music. By Neal Shepherd. (Constable. 7s. 6d.)

Tryst for a Tragedy. By E. C. R. Lorac. (Crime Club. 7s. 6d.)

The Man Who Could Not Shudder. By John Dickson Carr. (Hamish Hamilton. 7s. 6d.)

Funeral for Five. By Jonathan Stagge. (Michael Joseph. 8s.)

The People Ask Death. By George Dyer. (Heinemann. 8s.)

Who's the Guy? By A. J. Evans. (Hodder and Stoughton. 8s. 3d.)

Unwilling Adventurer. By John Gloag. (Cassell. 8s.)

Now that the redoubtable Mrs. Bradley seems to be feeling her years, a new psychiatrist-detective is very welcome upon the scene of the crime. We have had several rather amateurish dabblers in psychology; but Miss McCloy's Dr. Basil Willing is the real thing at last. His investigation of the murder of a distinguished refugee scientist at an American university is masterly throughout: we have only to hear him discussing the function of the creative imagination in crime to realise that here is a detective right on top of his work. The trail, which is neatly and legitimately confused by certain experiments of Raymond Prickett, the egregious professor of Experimental Psychology, and by some extraordinary discrepancies of evidence, remains thrilling and baffling to the end. A plan is needed to make clear the significance of one of the chief clues: but this is a small flaw in a well-written, well-documented tale, which carries its erudition lightly and contains vivid flashes of character. Miss Allingham's characters, as always, are lively and striking. The plot of *Black Plumes*, which centres upon the death of an eminent art-dealer, is plausible enough and enables the author to move in an environment with which she is obviously familiar: but the detection lacks the attack and precision of her best work; Inspector Bridie is, pardonably, a little bemused by the eccentricities of his suspects—I fancy Mr. Campion should have been called in to help him.

The next three novels are all essays in solid detection of the classical type. *Counterpoint Murder* (the title has nothing to do with music, but is highly significant to the plot) shows the Coles at their best again. The apparently unrelated deaths of a businessman in his club and an old lady in Kensington, com-

pllicated by a hit-and-run accident and the discreditable activities of a firm of contractors (named, by a strange coincidence, "Burke and Hare"), give the police plenty to think about. This story is developed with great smoothness and competence. *Exit to Music* is an even more solid piece of work, though by no means stodgy. Here, the *milieu* is one of musicians and their patron. Mr. Shepherd rather exaggerates the oddity and irritability of these "lousy fiddlers"; his detective might have gone sooner into the question of how the poison was administered; and I don't see how a girl "bit her lip so that it went white" when we have just been told that her mouth was heavily made-up. But the problem is fairly presented, and the minutiae of the investigation are rendered extremely interesting. *Tryst for a Tragedy* is set amongst the "county" in the Cotswolds. Miss Lorac does not, perhaps, do full justice to this lay-out; but at least she avoids caricaturing their sillier characteristics. She does puzzle us, too, as to who could possibly be the murderer, in a tale of subtle and unobtrusive merit.

Mr. Carr opens with his usual effervescence, but his story fizzles out some way before it ends. A haunted house, a pistol that lifts itself off a wall and shoots a man, a venerable butler swinging from a chandelier—these will do very well: but the *modus operandi* is too elaborate and far-fetched for my liking. Mr. Stagge is another writer with real talent for curdling the blood. Old ladies who bear human tooth-marks on their throats can be relied upon to enlist our close attention. The clues are briskly deployed and very clever; but the motive for the first killing is rather strained, and the atmosphere soon loses reality. *The People Ask Death*, another American novel, throws strange light upon the licence given to amateur investigators over there; its chief merit, however, lies in its horrifying—and much more credible—account of the way a newspaper campaign can prejudice the trial of an innocent man. *Who's the Guy?* by the author of *The Escaping Club* gives us a pyrotechnic but not original method of disposing of the body. It is a slow-moving book, and its humour is of the embalmed English type; but the central character keeps our interest alive. Mr. Gloag knows that the prim, fussy little man who gets involved in the most fantastic adventures is a sure hit with all right-thinking escapists; but a writer of thrillers must take himself (or seem to be taking himself) seriously; Mr. Gloag is, alas! carried away by the frivolity for which he has an admitted talent.

NICHOLAS BLAKE.

The ten pamphlets on British institutions published by Messrs. Longmans, which were the subject of Mr. G. M. Young's article, "A Fair Picture," in *The Spectator* of January 3rd, were prepared by the British Council.

FINANCE AND INVESTMENT

By CUSTOS

NOBODY should be surprised at a moderate fall in banking profits. Gross earnings in 1940 were doubtless helped by the use of a substantially larger volume of deposits, but against that factor must be set a less remunerative disposition of assets, and